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ARCHITECTURAL NOTES ON KILKENNY CASTLE.

COMMUNICATED BY JAMES G. ROBERTSON, ESQ., ARCHITECT.

ANY record of the plan and appearance of Kilkenny Castle, as it existed before the late alterations, being likely to prove of interest to the members of the Kilkenny Archæological Society, I shall make no apology for laying before them some notes made during the progress of the demolition and re-edification of the structure, by the architect, the late William Robertson, Esq., of Rose Hill, and which are illustrated by lithographs of some of the pen-and-ink sketches accompanying my late relative's manuscript. The tinted lithograph of the court-yard of the castle as it appeared before the year 1825 (which accompanies this paper) is copied from a drawing made for the late Mr. Robertson, in order to illustrate his intended work on the antiquities of Kilkenny, and completes a series of four views of the castle taken for that purpose. The other three had been engraved by that gentleman, and they have been lately published by me, from the plates left by him.¹ The following are the notes above alluded to:—

"In March, 1825, on accidentally viewing the castle with the countess of Ormonde, I observed that the massive buttress which had been applied to the centre of the then court front was very considerably protruded from the inclined line of direction which its summit had. The singularity of the circumstance attracted my attention, and on examination I found the wall to which it was applied in a loose and bad state, the buttress itself consisting of a mere shell of cut stone, the core principally of dry rubble. On applying plumb lines to the front wall, I found the summit overhanging about fourteen inches, particularly adjoining the buttress, diminishing as you receded to the right and left of it. The interior also exhibited marked proofs of derangement.

"Lord Ormonde's friends having suggested to him the propriety of getting other opinions besides mine, Mr. Semple, architect, of Dublin, was called in by his lordship, and after examination he not only fully concurred in my opinions, but went considerably farther. Shortly after this, I was directed to take measures to watch the state of the building, and to report if I should observe any farther tendency to dilapidation. The fissures were immediately filled by my orders, and wooden wedges inserted loosely in several of the open joints, so that if there should be any farther increase of these, the wedges would fall out. In the course of about a month, it was apparent to the eye that the progress of dilapidation was proceeding, and in another month it appeared to increase so rapidly, that on a representation of these circumstances, orders were given to take down the roof, walls, &c., of

¹ *Antiquities and Scenery of the County of Kilkenny*, edited and published by James George Robertson. Kilkenny, 1851; oblong folio.

the centre buildings. Amongst the many circumstances discovered in taking down the old works the following deserve notice :—

“ On relieving the internal front wall from the weight of the roof and heavy slates which had accelerated the dilapidation, it was found that the *massive* buttress was only so in appearance ; the casing of cut stone being only filled with dry rubble, and totally incompetent to afford any resistance to the falling wall.

“ On removing the old oak stairs, we found under them a portion of the masonry of the original castle, of singular solidity and massiveness, the mortar so indurated and attached to the stones embedded in it, that they were as one substance, and could not be separated without breaking the mass into pieces ; and it is very remarkable that this mortar retained quite sharply the traces of tools employed in cutting it, as if it had been stone.

“ The break in which the butler’s room formerly was, and in which the principal stairs now are, was found to be in a most dilapidated and very dangerous state, the traces of many and injudicious changes were very apparent, and this entire angular break was ascertained to have been but a comparatively modern addition, probably of the period of the repairs in 1682, for on taking it down, the inclined foundation of the straight curtain wall, which, certainly, has connected the west and east towers, was found on the level of the hall, and this break was projected beyond the line of this foundation ; it was also found that where this break ‘headed’ against the east tower, its masonry was not united with that of the tower, but merely built up against it, for the circular work of the tower returned beyond the junction internally, as at A (figure 1, plate of details), the dotted line marks the direction of the old curtain wall. At the point B there was an arched porch, which we took down ; it had a roof of stone and stone door jambs with strong iron hooks inserted in them to take the hinges of the door, which had certainly been an *external* one, from the great strength of the door jambs ; and from its height above the level of the ground it must have been approached by stone steps. At C were the old foundations (under the stairs) of some former building, the masonry of extreme solidity, extending in length about twenty feet, in breadth nearly the same, and connected with the tower.

“ The different floors in the break (A, figure 1) were sustained by very strong beams laid on corbels in the ancient manner, a mode well calculated to preserve the timber (figure 2).

“ Under the old back door (marked D in figure 1) was found a wide flue or passage descending to the vaults under the castle, to the level of the river. It was four feet in height by two feet in width, and built with stone ; it passed obliquely outward under the steps. I arched in the mouth of it. The inclined foundation of the curtain wall descends, I suppose, to the level of the back lawn, or deeper ; under the terraces I followed it about seven feet (figure 3).

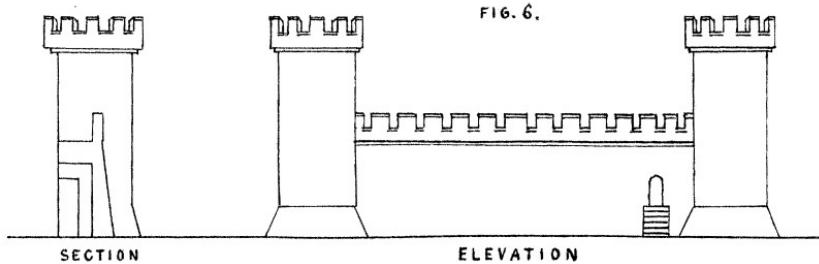
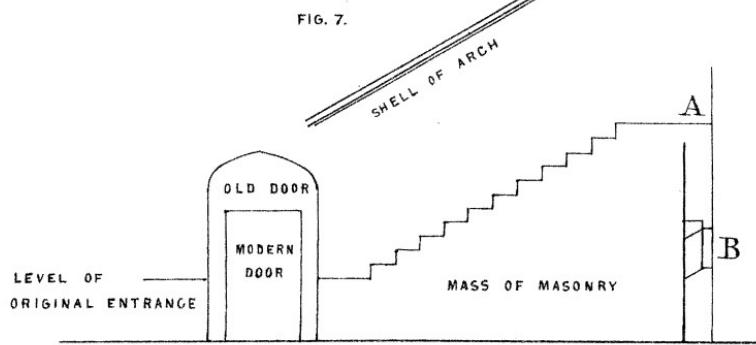


FIG. 5.

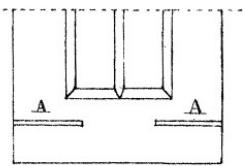


FIG. 4.

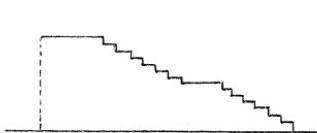


FIG. 3.



FIG. 1.

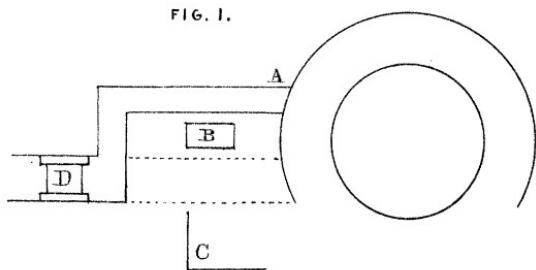
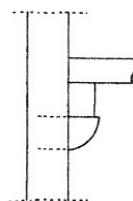


FIG. 2.



"Under the window of lord Ormonde's room,¹ at the back lawn side, was found a postern entrance connected with a gallery which runs under the court-yard in the direction of the south tower, between which and the present gateway buildings, about midway, it descends by steps and passes out under the wall towards the stables. The steps were of lime-stone and very much worn, about sixteen in number, forming two flights (see figure 4), with a stone door frame both at the foot and at the top of the landings, with holes in the jambs for bolts that gave them great security ; all the jambs both of doors and windows were of a soft brown grit, of which we have now no quarry. There are more of those steps under the window of lord Ormonde's room, which were not disturbed ; they led to the passage, or gallery and ditch at the town side. The bones of a human skeleton, with two or three copper coins, were found in this passage.

"Adjoining the gate buildings, the parapets of the old curtain wall were discovered, with its embrasures, spike-holes, and platform ; a flight of steps ascended from the banquet or platform to the west tower, in which was the record room. We also found remains of the curtain wall in the rere front at the same level, and the old parapets of the west tower were under the stairs which led to the roof, so that it would appear that the form of this castle at a very early period was somewhat as shown in figure 6.

"In taking down the walls of the west tower, it was discovered that they had contained recesses and galleries. Of the last, we found the broken remains of the covering arch and steps, which led from it to the parapet, two feet four inches long ; the north window of lady Ormonde's room was cut as if the gallery had passed through it. One of the recesses contained a window two feet six inches wide, with cut stone frame, and at each side of it was a seat formed of a flag stone ; the space between the seats (AA, figure 5) was so narrow as scarcely to admit persons to sit opposite to one another with ease. The entire thickness of the walls was six feet six inches ; of this the front wall was but two feet four inches, and well built ; the remaining thickness was but loosely built and filled in.

"In preparing to erect the staircase and water closets in the east part of the building, adjoining the tower which overhangs the river, we had to regulate the surface of the wall connected with that tower, which, in consequence of whatever buildings had originally been connected with it having been carelessly removed, was very irregular. In removing the broken offsets as they had stood for many years, several circumstances came to light worthy of preserving the recollection of.

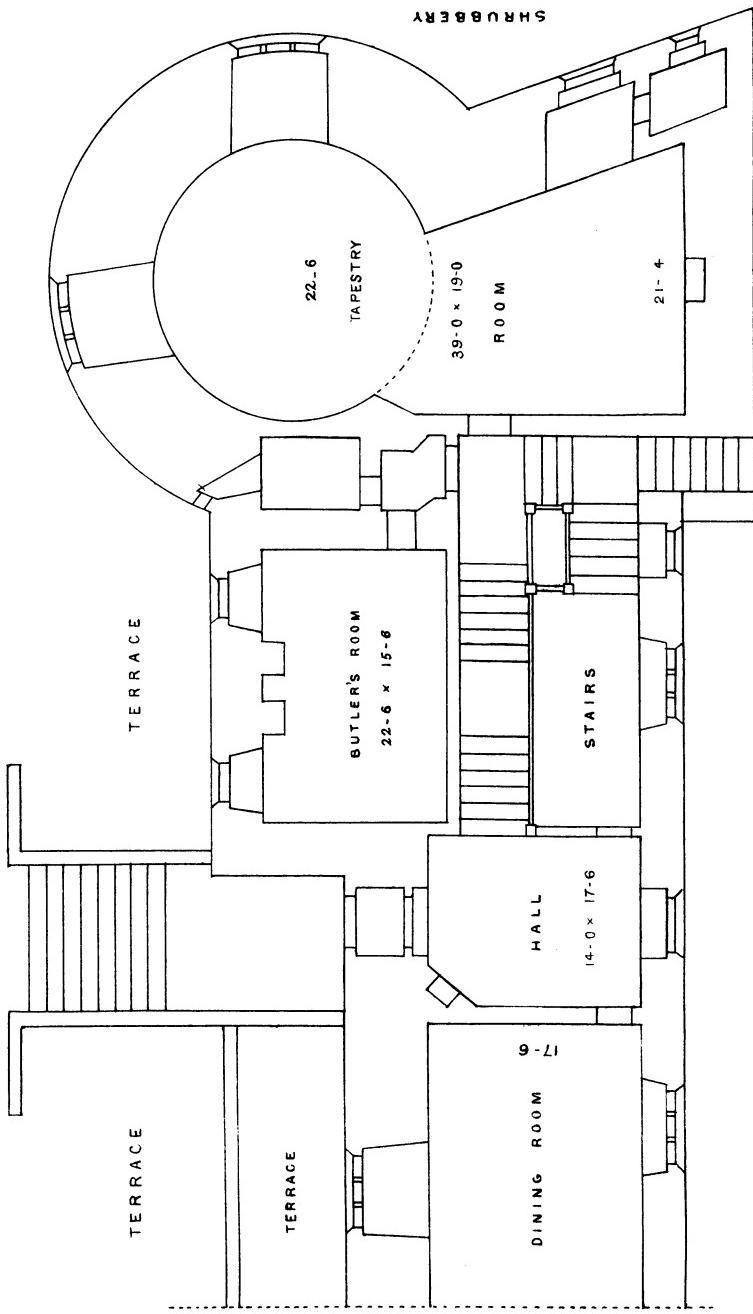
"At the back of the fire-place of the apartment which has latterly been used as a kitchen we found the remains of a stone stairs, which, from being four feet six inches wide, must have been an important

¹ This room was on the ground floor adjoining the western tower ; it is now used as a dining-room, under the window of which the postern above mentioned was situated.

one, and probably the principal stairs of the castle. It landed in the small closet adjoining the tapestry room, and was only discovered by the removal of the floor, preparatory to the erection of the new additions. It was seated on a solid mass of masonry twelve feet thick, and descended to the level of the hall or room above described as a kitchen; about seven steps were found perfect and connected; they were of lime-stone in one piece each; the frame of the door at the foot of this stairs was formed of brown grit, and consisted of many small stones—the head a flat pointed arch, rudely formed. At the springing we found inserted a very strong iron hook on which the door had been hung; the iron was two and a-half inches thick, and from the working of the door the back of it was much worn; and from what we know of the wearing of iron, it must have been in its place for many years. Lower down we found the grooves in which the fastenings for security ran, and in one of them the wooden bolt remained, but as might be expected, perfectly rotten. Another singular circumstance respecting this door was, that although the entrance to the hall or kitchen was between the same jambs, the level of the modern door was four feet below the level of the ancient one, for at that level the brown grit ceased, and lime-stone was used in the four feet; this gave the old door a most disproportioned appearance until the hacking off of the old plaster explained the cause, for the entire mass of masonry forming the original floor appeared to have been cut down to the lower level, as represented in figure 7.

“Another curious circumstance we discovered, was a spike-hole (B, figure 7) in a wall of two feet thick, which formed part of the mass of masonry on which the steps were seated; at the thickness of two feet the back of this wall had the old plastering on it; the arch of the spike-hole and its stone jambs were perfect. It is obvious that the building of the mass of masonry and the seating of the steps were subsequent to the building of the thin wall which contained the spike-hole, and which appears to me to have been part of a wall enclosing some small court looking down upon the river. This circumstance carries the mind very far back into the history of this castle; for the stairs were very rude, and the immense mass of masonry on which the steps were seated was all grouted work, and yet the spike-hole and thin wall formed parts of an earlier building. The stone used in the door case and frame of the spike-hole was also different from that used in the more modern works. I am of opinion that the room at present called the ‘tapestry room’ was originally divided into two apartments, for the above stairs led to one of them, which was *square*; and another stairs at the other side communicated with the other, which was *circular*, and in the tower, which latter stairs also communicated with the platform on the curtain wall.

“The hill under the new flag tower, now in progress, was found, whilst regulating the sewers, to be strengthened or fortified with walls of masonry, running down the hill at regular intervals, and at right angles to this front of the building.”



J. G. ROBERTSON, DELT.

KILKENNY CASTLE — PART OF ORIGINAL PLAN.

N.E. ANGLE.

As an addendum to the above, I give a diagram (see plate on opposite page) showing the plan of the eastern tower, the "break" alluded to in Mr. William Robertson's Report, and the original hall and stair-case of the castle, as they existed before the alterations were commenced. Several small rooms and passages in the thickness of the ancient wall are also laid down on the plan, which is copied from an old drawing now in the possession of the marquis of Ormonde.

NOTES ON THE
EXCAVATION OF A RATH AT DUNBEL, COUNTY OF
KILKENNY.

BY JOHN G. A. PRIM.

HAVING ascertained that a rath, or ancient Celtic fort, was being levelled and trenched on the lands of Dunbel, in the county of Kilkenny, by Mr. Michael White, the tenant of the farm, the Rev. James Graves and I considered it our duty, as Secretaries to this Society, to make a personal inspection of the operations there carried on, and ascertain whether any, and what remains of ancient art, domestic utensils, weapons, or ornaments had been discovered in the course of the work. We, accordingly, lost no time in proceeding to the spot, and saw sufficient to interest us so far as to induce us to repeat our visits frequently, and carefully superintend the operations. The result of our observations on those occasions I now beg leave to report to the Society.

The townland of Dunbel—which name the people of the locality translate "the fort of Baal," or, according to some, "of fire," taking the emblem by which the Pagan deity was represented as expressed by the name of the deity himself¹—is thickly studded over with the intrenched habitations of the aboriginal inhabitants of this country; but in the neighbourhood of the Nore, along the elevated ground above the eastern bank of the river, these remains are particularly numerous, every second or third field usually containing one or two raths, located in close contiguity, and showing that this portion of the country was densely populated in the primæval period. On the farm of Mr. White, where it is intersected by the Waterford and Kilkenny Railway, within half a mile of Bennetts-bridge, there is, or rather was, a very remarkable group of circular raths. The principal one is con-

¹ I do not mean to vouch for the correctness of this derivation, which smacks very strongly of the Vallancey school, and

perhaps was picked up by the people from some visitor imbued with the etymological *mania* of the worthy general.